

HINTS & TIPS CONCERNING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

It is impossible to address all exposures to violence and have a planned strategy to neutralize each situation. Being alert of your surroundings and conditions is very important.

Risks in the workplace must be addressed. The following is a list of possible risks as gathered from the questionnaire and discussions:

- 1) Being complacent – no violent act experience, YET.
- 2) Clients having a sense of being treated unfairly, whether real or imagined.
- 3) Clients who have a history of violent behavior or behavior disorders.
- 4) Working alone in the office.
- 5) Outside agencies clients who have a history of violent behavior or behavior disorders.
- 6) Building neighbors dealing with a large amount of money.
- 7) Bomb threats.
- 8) Someone suspicious gets on an elevator.
- 9) Parking space security or lack thereof.
- 10) No restrictions for persons with no legitimate reason for being there.
- 11) Travel away from the office both in town and out of town.

Have a plan in place to alert others should a violent incident occur. It is important in the prevention program to know WHO to contact, WHEN to contact, and HOW to contact:

- 1) Be familiar with all existing emergency procedures
- 2) Procedure for alerting/alarming co-workers
 - a) Verbal Code-word/name
 - b) Telephone - speed dial (i.e. 8-6510/1/2/4)
- 3) Procedure for alerting/alarming authorities
 - a) Telephone - speed dial - enhanced “9-911”
 - b) Cellular Phone “*2121”) giving:
 - i) Your Name
 - ii) Your Agency
 - iii) Location
 - iv) Name and Description of Suspect
 - c) Cell phone (in “vacant office” top left desk drawer) available in case of loss of conventional telephone service and/or power.
- 4) If a crime occurs, phone the police immediately. The quicker an investigation is initiated the better the chances of arrest.
- 5) Don't be hesitant about reporting anything you feel needs reporting, even if an actual crime hasn't take place.

Success and appropriateness of intervention strategies should be monitored and adjusted with continued data collection.

- 1) New and unique strategies may be needed. Share information gathered through travel, contacts, courses/classes, etc. with coworkers.
- 2) A little common sense will go a long way in protecting. Trust your instinct. If you feel uncomfortable in a place or situation, leave. Remember that it is your safety that is a stake. Don't think it can't happen to you. Act before, not after, the incident.

Things to do when dealing with a potentially violent person:

- 1) Assess the situation.
- 2) Project calmness.
- 3) Be patient, empathetic, and encourage the person to talk.
- 4) Ask questions. Find out specifically what the problem may be.
- 5) Focus your attention on the other person to show you are interested in what he/she has to say.
- 6) Maintain a relaxed yet attentive posture, and position yourself at as right angle rather than directly in front of the other person.
- 7) Acknowledge the person's feelings.
- 8) Ask for small, specific favors such as asking them to move to a quieter area.
- 9) Establish ground rules if unreasonable behavior persists.
- 10) Use delay tactics that will give the person time to calm down.
- 11) Be reassuring and point out choices.
- 12) Accept criticism positively.
- 13) Ask for recommendations and repeat what you feel is being requested.
- 14) Arrange yourself so that your exit is not blocked.
- 15) Have a neutral manager or third party in the room with you.
- 16) Don't use styles of communication which generate hostility.
- 17) Don't reject all of their demands from the start.
- 18) Don't pose in challenging stances.
- 19) Avoid any physical contact, finger pointing, or long periods of eye contact.
- 20) Don't make sudden moves that may seem threatening.
- 21) Don't challenge, threaten, or dare the individual.
- 22) Never belittle or make the person feel foolish.
- 23) Don't criticize or act impatient, especially if the person is agitated.
- 24) Don't attempt to bargain with a threatening individual.
- 25) Don't try to make the situation seem less serious than it is.
- 26) Don't make false statements or promises you cannot keep.
- 27) Don't explain technical/complicated information when emotions are high.
- 28) Don't take sides or disagree with fabrication.
- 29) Don't take remarks personally.

- 30) Don't show your anger.
- 31) Don't patronize; show respect.
- 32) Don't invade the individual's personal space.

Street safety –

It is easy to forget certain basic safety measures with the excitement of traveling. It is important to remember those basic rules you were always taught. The ones like "be careful talking to strangers" or "don't get into cars with people you don't know". Here are a few general tips to keep in mind while traveling.

- 1) Avoid all civil disturbances. If you are in your hotel, stay there!
- 2) Use a "dummy wallet." Carry an old wallet with \$20 or less in small denominations.
- 3) If you are robbed, turn over your dummy wallet immediately.
- 4) Keep the rest of your money stashed in a money belt, sock wallet, or in other pockets. (Note: Criminals have heard of money belts too.)
- 5) Remember that your life is more important than a watch or \$100.
- 6) Look around, stay aware, and take notice if someone seems too interested in you.
- 7) Stay alert while in public -- always be aware and conscious of what, or who, is around.
- 8) Walk with confidence and don't send out unconscious signals of vulnerability.
- 9) Follow your instincts. Intuition may be the best guide in many situations.
- 10) Don't walk alone. If possible, walk with someone -- a spouse, friend, group, etc.
- 11) Never flash money or other tempting targets like expensive jewelry in an area where someone can see it.
- 12) Notice the people around you and your surroundings. Is someone dressed differently or does something seem out of place? If you feel as if something is wrong, you are probably right.
- 13) Always walk as if you know what you are doing and have a purpose. Even if you are lost, at least look like you know what you are doing. Do not walk aimlessly, pointing and talking loudly. Blend in with your surroundings as much as possible. Your body language says a lot about you. If you are unaware of what's going on around you or look confused, you are a soft target and become easy prey.
- 14) Walk facing traffic to make it harder for kidnappers to grab you. It is easier for kidnappers to snatch you from a car coming from behind. If you are overwhelmed and cannot run or resist, simply lie down on the ground. Make them carry you!
- 15) Beware of scam artists posing as undercover policeman who ask to see your money to determine if it is counterfeit.
- 16) Do not discuss travel plans with strangers.

- 17) Keep all-important information on a need-to-know basis.
- 18) A drug called scopolamine is used by criminals in many countries to rob people. The usual procedure is that someone approaches you, opens a newspaper or similar object, and blows the powder in your face, rendering you unconscious. Scopolamine is also put into food and drinks in restaurants.
- 19) If you order a canned or bottled liquid, make sure it is unopened when you get it. If it is open, refuse it.
- 20) When you are in a restaurant, sit away from windows facing the street. Try to sit where you are facing a door to observe who enters. Plan an escape route in an emergency.
- 21) Carry a business card from your hotel.
- 22) If a local (especially a taxi driver) gives you a warning, heed that warning.
- 23) Evaluate information. For example, a local resident may say that a certain place is safe, and it might be perfectly safe for local. Is it safe for you though? It is wise to crosscheck information with other people and sources.
- 24) Be suspicious of an unexpected event that happens in your vicinity. View it as potentially dangerous, until you prove it otherwise.
- 25) Be discreet with your maps. It advertises that you are a tourist.
- 26) ATM's are becoming more available worldwide. It is best to use them during daylight hours with many people around.

Elevator Safety

- 1) Before entering an elevator, look at the persons inside the elevator. Respond to instinct, intuition or gut reactions. Don't get on an elevator with someone who makes you feel uneasy.
- 2) Stand near the controls. If threatened, sound the alarm and hit as many floor buttons as possible. Get off on the next floor if floor is occupied.
- 3) If you suspect trouble or are attacked, push the alarm button and as many floor buttons as possible so that the elevator will halt quickly, probably at the next floor.
- 4) If other passengers get off, leaving you with a person(s) who make you feel uneasy, get off with other passengers and wait for the next elevator.
- 5) Allow other passengers to push the buttons for their floors first.

Car safety –

To avoid finding yourself in the vulnerable position of being stranded, make sure your car is in tip-top shape before you set out. Once your journey begins, keep this advice in mind:

- 1) Plan your route.

- 2) Never leave luggage, video cameras, cameras, phones or computer equipment visible in your car. Lock them in the trunk, or, preferably, keep them with you.
- 3) Carry an emergency roadside kit containing flares, a flashlight, first aid kit, blanket, etc. Cellular phones offer great safety advantages, too.
- 4) Don't drive in deserted areas at night and avoid poorly lit areas.
- 5) Keep your car's windows closed and doors locked while stopped in traffic. Leave ample room between your car and the car in front of you.
- 6) Don't stop and offer assistance at accidents. Criminals may stage them. Instead, drive to the nearest phone. Call the police and give the location of the accident.
- 7) Always look in the back seat before you enter the car.
- 8) Fill the tank. Make sure there's enough gas to get you where you're going and back.
- 9) Keep your car in good running condition.
- 10) Police use flashing red and blue lights. Do not pull over and stop for any vehicles using another color flashing light; instead, proceed to a public location or the nearest police station.
- 11) If another vehicle bumps your car from behind do not stop. Go to a well-lit service station or the nearest police station.
- 12) If someone attempts to take your car by force, let them. Possessions can be replaced, you can't. Report the incident to the police immediately.
- 13) Plan your route of travel in advance, particularly when traveling unfamiliar areas.
- 14) Keep doors locked and windows rolled up whenever possible.
- 15) Don't stop to assist a disabled motorist. Instead, contact law enforcement.
- 16) Be suspicious of anyone approaching your vehicle. Be ready to drive away.
- 17) If struck from behind or in a suspicious way, stay in your vehicle until law enforcement arrives.
- 18) If you think you are being followed, drive to a location with lots of lights and people around; if possible, the nearest police station. Do not drive straight home.
- 19) If your car breaks down, activate the emergency flashers. When someone stops, ask them to phone for help.
- 20) Park in well lit areas. Lock your doors, windows rolled up. A well-lighted parking lot with a good line of sight from the building is a deterrent.
- 21) Approach your car with keys in hand. Before entering the car, look inside.
- 22) Don't mark your key chain with your name, address, or license number.
- 23) If possible, carry a cellular phone.

Rest area safety –

- 1) When entering a rest area, look for the number of vehicles present. Avoid exiting your vehicle if only one vehicle is present or if something or someone looks suspicious.
- 2) If possible, pick a busy rest area occupied with several vehicles and people.
- 3) Don't park next to a van's sliding door.
- 4) Make sure the rest area is well lit before exiting your vehicle at night.
- 5) Keep your purse and other valuables out of sight, preferably in the trunk.
- 6) Return to your vehicle with your keys in hand. Do a quick scan of your vehicle's interior before unlocking your door.
- 7) Motorist should be observant when they enter a rest area. If they feel uncomfortable with the situation, they should not stop but proceed to the next rest area or city.

Motel Safety –

- 1) **Choosing a Hotel.** Guidebooks can offer advice on the cleanliness and reliability of hotels as well as what areas of a city to avoid.
- 2) **Checking In.** When checking in, women should use only their first initial and last name. Make sure the hotel clerk does not announce your room number; if this happens, quietly request a new room.
- 3) **Fire Safety.** Be sure to acquaint yourself with the fire escape routes posted on the back of the entry door. Look for the location of the closest exit and a secondary one should the primary exit be blocked.
- 4) **Inside Your Guest Room.** Use all locks and chains on doors and windows while in the room. Never open the door to a stranger — always look out the peephole before opening the door. If you do not recognize the person, or if there is no peephole, call the front desk and ask one of the clerks to come to your room and identify the person.
- 5) **Safeguarding Your Key.** Know where your room key is at all times. If you leave during an emergency take the key with you; if the exits are impassable, or if it's a false alarm, you will need it to get back into your room. Never leave your room key or card unattended; if you visit the pool or fitness center, leave your key with a clerk at the front desk.
- 6) **Away From Your Guest Room.** Lock all luggage that you leave unattended in the room, and put anything of value in the hotel's safe — be sure to ask for a receipt for goods turned over. While you're out, leave on some lights, the television, and/or the radio. Leave your car in the parking lot as close to the hotel as possible, particularly if the parking lot is not well lit.

The following is a list of fitting employee-training sessions for consideration:

- 1) How to recognize and handle threatening, aggressive, or violent behavior
- 2) Verbal de-escalation techniques
- 3) Self defense/restraint procedures
- 4) workplace violence prevention program
- 5) how to ask for emergency assistance by phone or by alerting other staff
- 6) emergency response procedures (bomb threat)
- 7) Explanation of the agency's workplace violence policy;
- 8) Encouragement to report incidents;
- 9) Ways of preventing or diffusing volatile situations or aggressive behavior;
- 10) How to deal with hostile persons;
- 11) Managing anger;
- 12) Techniques and skills to resolve conflicts;
- 13) Stress management, relaxation techniques, wellness training;
- 14) Security procedures, e. g., the location and operation of safety devices such as alarm systems;
- 15) Personal security measures; and
- 16) Programs operating within the agency that can assist employees in resolving conflicts, e. g., the Employee Assistance Program, the ombudsman, and mediation.